

## The Day of War: Madison Square, June 20th

*Giovannitti, Arturo, 1884-1959*

A hawk-faced youth with rapacious eyes, standing on a shaky chair,  
Speaks stridulously in the roar of the crossways, under the tower that challenges the skies, terrible  
like a brandished sword.

A thin crowd, idle, yawning, many-hungered, beggarly, rich with the inexhaustible treasures of  
endless hours of dreaming and scheming.

Imperial ruins of the Mob.

Listens to him, wondering why he speaks and why they listen.

The fierce incandescence of noon quivers and drones with the echoes

Of distant clamors, grumbling of voices, blarings of speed-mad fanfares;

But as the roar reaches the group, it turns and recoils and deviates, and runs around it,

As a stream runs around a great rock,

And his voice alone is heard in this little island of silence.

His arms go up as he speaks; his white teeth fight savagely with his black eyes,

His red tie flows tempestuously in the wind, the unfurled banner of his heart amidst the musketry  
of his young words.

He has been speaking since dawn; he has emerged from the night, and the night alone shall  
submerge him.

They listen to him and wonder, and grope blindly in the maze of his words,

They fear his youth and they pity it,

But the sunlight is strong on his head,

And his shadow is heavy and hard upon their faces.

Suddenly, like a flash of yellow flame

The blast of a trumpet shoots by, its notes ramming like bullets against the white tower.

The soldiers march up the Avenue. The crowd breaks, scatters, and runs away, and only six  
listeners remain:

A girl, a newsboy, a drunken man, a Greek who sells rugs, and old man, and the stranger I know.

But he speaks on, louder, with the certainty of thunder that only speaks after the bolt.

"Workers of America, we alone can rehabilitate this generation before history. We must and shall  
stop this war."

The Greek vendor moves on; wearily the old man turns towards a seat, far away.

But he speaks on.

"The great voice of Labor shall rise fearlessly today, and, the world shall listen, and eternity shall  
record its words."

The drunken man grumbles, stares at his open hands and lurches away towards the approaching  
tramway.

But he speaks on.

"Our protest and our anger shall be like a cloud- burst, and the masters shall tremble. Brothers,  
don't you see it? The Revolution is at the threshold."

The newsboy swings his bag over his shoulder and dashes away through the park.

But he speaks on.

"As sure as this sun shall set, so will injustice and tyranny go down. Men and women of America.  
I know that this is the great day."

The stranger I know shrinks in the hollow places of himself; he fades; and vanishes, molten in the  
white heat of that young faith.

But the girl stands still and immobile, her upturned face glowing before the brazier of his soul,  
As from the tower one by one drop at his feet the twelve tolls of the clock that marks time, the time  
that knows and flows on until his day comes.

And the girl, and the tower, and he

Are the only three things that stand straight and rigid and inexpugnable

Amidst the red omens of war,

In the fulness of the day,

In the whiteness of the moonlight,

In the city of dread and uproar.